

THE
AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF
Col. Jonathan Burnham
OF
Salisbury, Massachusetts

REPRODUCED

In facsimile from the original printed
at Portsmouth, N. H., in 1814
with an introduction



SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS
December, 1909

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HISTORICAL NOTE

The hero of the following narrative, a son of Essex County, was born June 9th, 1738, at Chebacco parish, Ipswich, Massachusetts, in what is now the town of Essex. He was the son of Jonathan and Elizabeth (Proctor) Burnham, and the eldest of a family of eleven children. He relates that he married the daughter of his "good old master." She was Abigail Ross, the daughter of Samuel and Abigail Ross of Ipswich. This event took place in October (intention of marriage, October 3d), 1761. Her father's house then stood on the ledge nearly opposite where the Ipswich Female Seminary afterwards was located, and beside the house was the small blacksmith shop where Jonathan Burnham was taught "the art and craft" of smithing. In the summer of 1763 he removed to Hampton Falls, New Hampshire, where he bought the old Swett tavern, and continued in this occupation until some time during the Revolutionary war. The liberty pole that he speaks of raising was probably erected upon the hill near this tavern. After the war he opened a tavern in another house, and there he remained until about 1797, when he removed to Salisbury, the adjoining town, just over the Massachusetts line, where he died in 1823.

He does not seem to have been a leading figure in town affairs, save in military matters, in which he was always very active and continued to sustain the reputation he had gained as a good soldier in two wars—a man of courage and ability. The historian of Hampton Falls records the circumstances of the last public appearance of Colonel Burnham. It was at a Fourth of July celebration held on Powwow hill. Dressed in full Continental uniform, his long white hair streaming behind him as he approached on horseback, the colonel is said to have presented a splendid and impressive figure. On reach-

ing the top of the hill he was greeted with an ovation befitting his rank and long and distinguished military service. A toast in his honor was proposed. The reply was characteristic of the man. "Our Country must live and fill her destiny. Our distinguished soldier and friend George Washington said so, and I, Colonel Burnham, with the blue heaven above me and the broad ocean before me, call upon all true sons of America, upon this broadsword, which did service at Bunker Hill, to swear it shall be so." This rousing sentiment, uttered by the Colonel as he sat upright upon his horse, swaying his sword about him as if he would repel the enemy, was greeted with loud applause, and a national salute was fired, and while the punch was stirred, the hearts of the assembled patriots were stirred as well.

The doughty Colonel's narrative, which follows, is reproduced in facsimile from a copy which formerly was the property of Eugene Noyes of Amesbury, and now is in the possession of his son, Edward Noyes, through whose courtesy it is here presented. The only other known example is preserved in the Force collection at the Congressional Library in Washington. This somewhat vain-glorious account of personal achievement preserves some record of two events of much interest in Salem and vicinity :—the rescue of seventy shipwrecked men and women from the Isle of Sable, by Captain Selman, who sailed for "King" Hooper of Marblehead, some contemporaneous account of which may be found in the January 26 and February 9, 1761 issues of the *Boston Gazette*, and secondly, a short account of the "Ipswich Fright," so picturesquely described by John Greenleaf Whittier, and also mentioned by Coffin, the historian of Newbury.

G. F. D.

THE
AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF
COL. JONATHAN BURNHAM

THE
L I F E
OF
Col. Jonathan Burnham,

Now living in Salisbury, Mass. ;

Being a Narrative of his long and useful Life.

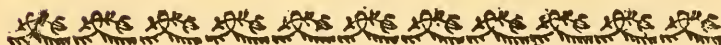
CONTAINING

A RECITAL OF

Highly Interesting Incidents,

Relative to the Revolutionary Services and private
life, of this distinguished Soldier and Friend
of the departed and beloved

George Washington.



PORTSMOUTH :

Printed and sold at S. WHIDDEN'S Printing Office,
Spring-Hill. — May 1814.





A HISTORY

OF THE

Most Remarkable Things of my Life ;

I, Jonathan Burnham,

the fourth, was born at Chebacco, June the 9th, 1738, where I saw many remarkable things, the first I went with my parents a Sunday morning to hear the Rev. Mr. Pickering preach, and as I got to the meeting house, the minister and people ran out for fear the house would fall on them, for the earth did shake and after sometime the minister says to the people we will go in for we are as safe there as any where, and the whole of them went in and was very attentive to hear him pray and preach, and the people was greatly alarmed and was concerned what they should do to be saved, and went from house to house to pray with and for one another, and the Lord sent two brothers Mr. John and Ebenezer Cleavland, and the people built a house and settled John Cleavland, whose labours were greatly blessed, for in one year ninety persons were taken into his Church and many more wonderful things happened ; the throat distemper killed many of my mates and many little children, and two other things I merely escaped being drowned, but the Lord preserved me from a watery grave and many more wonderful things I remembered ; and when I was but fifteen years old, I went to live at Ipswich town, with Mr. Samuel Ross, to learn a blacksmiths trade, and

was bound to him,---a good old man that built his house upon a rock and brought his family up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, where I lived 'till I was nineteen years of age, and then I bought my time and enlisted in the service of King George the second, and slung my pack and marched to Fort Edward, where I slept sweetly, and the next day I slung my pack and followed my Colonel 7 miles to half way Brook Fort Halfway to Lake George, where my Colonel was ordered to halt and keep that Fort, and guard the teams to Lake George that sold provision to General Abercrombie's army. Early one morning the Indians gave us battle, and killed 26 of our brave men and scalped them, and ran into the woods to Canada and sold their scalps for a guinea a scalp to the French who was worse than the Indians themselves, as it was said, then Gen. Abercrombie ordered my Colonel to lead on his men to Lake George, and he cross'd the Lake of a Thursday and landed, and Friday marched his army to take Ticonderoga Fort, where he was beat and did retreat back to his old encampment with his weed on his hat dragging on the ground ! with the loss of more than nineteen hundred men ; where I tarried till my time was out, this was in the year of '58, and then I was honorably dismissed and returned back to my good old master to Ipswich, who was glad to see me alive, where I remained 'till the year '59, and then I enlisted again under the brave General Wolf, who went and did take Canada ; and I enlisted again in the year '60 to finish the war, which gave me much pleasure and then I was honorably dismissed at Lewisburg, and shipped with capt. John Potter, of Ipswich, to sail with him to the place of my nativity, and we sailed a Friday and lost our sails in a gale of wind, and a Sunday was close to the Isle of Sables, where we dropt anchor and rode until our windless bits gave way, and cut our cable and ashore we went on the Island cold Sables, this was the fifth of December '60, where we all got ashore alive and glad was we, for God's goodness was wonderful to us in preserving our lives from a watery grave, and we all laid down on a sand nole and slept alike. A bear that was shot when he was asleep and carried him

home and sent a part to captain Furlongs men, of Newbury, who was cast ashore 3 weeks before we were, who hoisted a flag on a pole and a vessel belonged to Marblehead carried the news, and as two fishermen was missing, the Lord and King Hooper sent the good old Archelaus Silmen to come to the Isle of Sables after us and the Lord rewarded him for his good works, for he took seventy men and women but while we waited on the Island for the good old Silmen I shouldered my gun and went 14 miles toward the Northwest barr---up jump't a sow and I shot her through the heart, and had it and the liver and lights for supper, and it was sweet as honey and then I killed a bull, 18 miles from our house and carried it home which was January '61, and then I shouldered my gun and was all alone and I shot 8 balls into a great bull who tried to kill me, but I was his master and glad was I, for the bull and I had it tough and tough, and then I was beat out but got home that night, and told my messmates to take the hand sled and haul the bull home, and 3 days after which was January 18, come the good old Silman and took us all off the Isle of Sables, seventy in number, and carried us to Halifax, and left Furlong and 60 men and women and then good old Archelous Silmen brought captain Potter and his crew ten in number into Marblehead, where we rejoiced and was glad and gave him the good old man one hundred silver dollars, and as many thanks, and got home to Ipswich, the place of our nativity, where we had gladness and joy for God's goodness in preserving us from a watery grave, and returning us home to our friends who were glad to see us alive, and my good old master that built his house upon a rock, says to me Jonathan we read that a faithful servant shall be a dutiful son at length, and gave me his eldest daughter to wife, who was a beauty and loved me as her eyes, where we lived 'till July '63, and then we moved to Hamptonfalls in Newhampshire on a place I bought where we lived and did prosper, for a most forty years, and as I had been in the British service 3 years to learn the art of war---the town of Hampton-Falls chose me to be their captain, and I received my commission signed by Gov. Wentworth and sealed with King George's

real, and all things went on very well 'till King George sent that foolish Gage to Boston who was neither weight nor measure, to burn our towns and kill our men at Lexington, and Gov. Wentworth joined the British, and I was angry and raised a Liberty pole on the hill as high as Haman's gallows was to hang Mordecai on, which was my alarm post, and in the morning the news came to me, that the British had marched to Lexington and killed our men, and I ordered my drums to beat and gave my company something to drink, and marched on to Ipswich that night, which was twenty miles in half a day, and in the morning we mustered about two hundred men, who chose me to be their captain, and the town was alarmed because two Men of Wars tenders were in the river full of men, and would land and take twenty British soldiers out of a gaol that was taken prisoners at Lexington battle, and would burn the town, so we stayed that day and night and that night was rainy and the British landed at Marshfield to steal cattle and left the woods a fire, and the Newbury people that heard that Ipswich was burnt and that I and my men were all killed and that the British was coming to burn Newbury; and the people were afraid and got boats to get over the river to run into the woods, and that news went to Exeter that night, and very soon to Concord, that I and my officers were all killed, and in a few days I had a Colonels commission to raise one quarter part of Portsmouth, Dover, Hampton, and Exeter militia as minute men, and General Sullivan came to me to march off to Portsmouth with a thousand men to fortify and defend it from being burnt as the British had burnt Falmouth, and in twenty-four hours I and a thousand men were at Fort Washington to give the British battle where we stayed about three months, then came a fifty gun ship to anchor one night, and in the morning at brake of day I and my men were ready to give her battle, but she was afraid and went off, and in a few days the committee of safety that set at Portsmouth in recess of Congress, sent for me to hear two letters read from General Washington and General Sullivan, the contents were that they expected the British would give them battle, and

for the committee to send me on to Mistick with thirty-one companies of New-Hampshire Militia, and the committee desired me to enlist four companies of my men that was on Fort Washington, and when I asked my men four companies they said yes, we will all go with you, and marched that day and got to Mistick in three-days and nights, and twenty-seven companies followed on, and was into Mistick in a few days, and the committee delivered me the two letters to carry to the two Generals to Winterhill and Cambridge, and I mounted my horse which carried me in less than one day, and WASHINGTON smiles and says NEW-HAMPSHIRE FOREVER ; and further says to SULLIVAN mount your horse, and ride on with Col. Burnham to Mistick, and open all your stores to New-Hampshire Militia... without weight or measure, and go to the good men in Mistick who will be glad of Col. Burnham's men for they are afraid that the British that burnt Charleston will come and burn Mistick, and says to Col. Burnham do your best for the honor of New-Hampshire : and kill the British if they dare to come, but they were afraid of my Brigade ; and toward the last of January '76 I received orders from Gen. WASHINGTON that he would meet New-Hampshire Militia to-morrow at Winterhill, to review them, and I mounted my horse and at 9 o'clock formed my Brigade and marched to Winterhill with my band of music fifty fifes and drums, that the British might hear and see we were come on to Winterhill, to try our skill, which gave the British afright to quit Bunkerhill in the night, and the British army and fleet made a quick retreat, and the Boston people were glad to see it. Where we remained 'till honorably dismissed by our Hon. General Washington and received his thanks for our services and love being ready at his call from New-Hampshire, and his blessings that we might return home to our families and friends in safety, where we rested awhile and then part of us went to help take Burgoine, Cornwallis and their armies, and then we had our independence from Great Britain, and peace and plenty and the love of the whole world, and were the happiest nation in the world. But God must have all the glory ;—

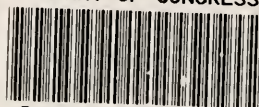
and our ministers were worthy like Jacob who wrestled 'till brake of day, that God would bless Washington and America, and the world of mankind. Amen and Amen. And now I am an old man this day seventy-five years old and but just alive, and what I have wrote I have seen and known to be true.

And now I must say this war is harder to me than three years service under King George the second to help take Canada, which was the middle wall of partition between the Indians and America, and now I have no King but Jesus, who says be ye angry but do not sin, and you may see that I am angry ;—and see Luke xiv, 31, which says what King goeth to war with ten thousand against another King that hath twenty thousand, without first counting the cost whether he be able or not ; and what King goeth to war with one thousand against England that hath more than one hundred thousand, and now if you aint blind and deaf you may see and hear drums a beating, colours flying, cannon roaring, men a dying, and garments rolled in blood, and call these the noblest effects of war, a dreadful war. And now the gold is become dim, and the most fine gold is changed ; and America is undone, for if we should take Canada it is not worth the life of one man, to America, and I think they have lost, taken and killed already more than ten thousand brave officers and men, and have spent not less than forty millions of dollars, which would have paid Congress for many years for other services and trouble.

Jonathan Burnham.

Salisbury, (Mass.) May 27, 1814.

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